

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000085

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/10/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [EUN](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#) [ITALY](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY'S CENTER-LEFT PLANS IRAQ PULLOUT BY END OF 2006

REF: A) 05 ROME 3179 B) ROME 4064

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli

Summary

1. (C) Romano Prodi's international affairs adviser and spokesperson January 10 expressed confidence in a center-left victory in Italy's elections next April. He said that a Prodi-led government would announce immediately upon winning national elections its intent to withdraw from Iraq. Ricardo Levi told Pol M/C an Italian troop withdrawal would not be precipitous, like Spain's, but conducted in close consultation with both allies and the government of Iraq. Pol M/C noted the need to safeguard Iraq's security and stability, and for any adjustment of troop levels to be conditions-based. Levi said there would be no surprises, but neither would there be an open-ended, conditions-based arrangement. The center-left coalition would require an agenda for withdrawal that would be completed within three to six months of a new government taking office, which Levi said was likely to occur in the second half of June. He stressed that a center-left government would remain committed to Iraq's development, whether through security or NATO training, economic development, or institution-building. Regarding possible future commitments of force abroad, Levi said a sine qua non for the center-left would be EU coordination. End Summary.

Use of Force Must Be Coordinated in European Context

2. (U) Following up on center-left leader Romano Prodi's December meeting with Ambassador (ref b), Pol M/C January 10 called on Ricardo Levi, the opposition chief's longtime international affairs adviser and spokesperson. Pol FSN accompanied.

3. (C) Pol M/C asked Levi if a Prodi government would see the country's various overseas commitments as necessary investments in regional stability and Italy's own security, or as overcommitments abroad that should be scaled back. Levi said the Italian presence was permanent, not a transitory phenomenon. It had begun before the current government came to power. But an important difference between left and right was that a center-left government would never undertake bilateral military commitments. Any commitment involving the use of military force would have to be coordinated in a European context.

Prodi Government Would Confirm Iraq Pullout by End of 2006

4. (C) On Iraq, Levi said that a Prodi-led government would confirm immediately after winning national elections, perhaps even on election day itself, its intent to withdraw from Iraq. The Prodi adviser said the decision would be carried out in close consultation with both allies and the government of Iraq. Pol M/C said that it was in our common interest to safeguard Iraq's security and stability. Any adjustment of troop levels should be conditions-based. Levi said there would be no surprises, a la Spain. But neither would there be an open-ended, conditions-based arrangement. Italy's center-left coalition would require an agenda for withdrawal within three to six months of a new government taking office, which he predicted would occur in the second half of June. A center-left government would remain committed to Iraq's development, whether through security or NATO training, economic development, or institution-building.

Iran Challenge Requires International Cooperation

5. (C) Pol M/C raised Iran, noting it was both an important regional power and a significant challenge to the international community, whether the issue was President Ahmadinejad's gratuitous insults to Israel or the nuclear issue. The Iranians did not respect weakness. It was essential to maintain a clear and unified international message. Levi agreed on the need to coordinate with both the United States and European allies on Iran. In fact, Prodi had done so before taking a trip to Iran as prime minister in 1997, making clear to Iranian leaders that he had coordinated

with his US and European colleagues and that whatever they said he would take back to them all. Italy could help open up channels to Iran if the conditions were right. Pol M/C said Italy's voice, because of its trading ties with Iran, was particularly influential. But it was important to speak up not only when positive opportunities present themselves, but when negative things happen, whether it was Ahhadinejad's statements on Israel or Iranian defiance of the IAEA and international community on the nuclear front. Levi said that Prodi had done so, e.g. he had called in the Iranian ambassador immediately after Ahmadinejad first spoke out, and had criticized the Iranian leader publicly as well.

Confident of Center-Left Win

16. (C) On domestic politics, the Prodi adviser expressed confidence in a center-left victory in April elections, but acknowledged the recent election law change (switching to all-proportional system) would likely give the opposition coalition a smaller working margin than they would have had previously. One difference with the last Prodi government, he said, was that the small Reformed Communist party (whose walkout toppled the last Prodi cabinet) had signed up in writing this time to the government platform. So all coalition parties were committed to supporting the platform for five years. Pol M/C asked if a Prodi government would try to roll back the new election law. Levi said he doubted this would be possible because power had now been returned to the political parties and "even our own" would not want to change this.

Comment

17. (C) It is not new news that a center-left coalition would want to move sooner rather than later towards a troop drawdown in Iraq. And Levi was quick to add Italy would remain substantially committed in other ways to helping Iraq's security, stability, and development. But he was more explicit than Prodi had been with us earlier in affirming the center-left intended to immediately reconfirm its intentions on troop withdrawal if they win. And while he laid out a notional timeline that could stretch to the end of 2006, and featured full consultations, he pointedly foreclosed any open-ended, purely conditions-based agreement. The larger significance here, however, is that Levi's presentation portends a Prodi government that will likely shift toward the comfort and cover of EU consensus, and away from the more independent, risk-taking decisionmaking style of the Berlusconi government. End comment.
SPOGLI